

**Appropriations Committee  
Thursday, February 22, 2023**

**House Bill 6659: AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE  
BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2025, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS  
THEREFOR.**

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Berthel, Representative Nuccio, and members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Cynthia Ross-Zweig and I am a paraeducator in the New Fairfield Public Schools. I am also the president of the Paraeducator Council of CSEA SEIU Local 2001, proudly representing thousands of paras throughout Connecticut. I am speaking today regarding the budget for elementary and secondary education.

Like so many others before me, I started in a district because my children were enrolled. Not wishing to return to a job that would require time away. I had the time and wanted to give back to the community. There is nothing more rewarding than to feel you have made a difference whether it's only for a day or a moment.

Para's bridge gaps in supporting learning challenged students by certified staff.. A couple of years ago I was assigned to a senior English class. It was the 4th semester and graduation was around the corner. Students would need a passing grade on the essay to graduate. The drafts were submitted and a small group of 5 did not meet the draft requirement. The final edit was due. They were in a panic. The group came to me and asked me to help them. I asked if they talked to the teacher. They stated I don't get it, it doesn't make sense, I'm not going to graduate. Please help. Can you stay after school?

As a parent of a child with severe ADHD I knew how difficult this was and concern over judgment. I knew what a big moment this was for them to acknowledge they needed help and ask for it. I told them let me see what I can do. I talked to the teacher AND ADMINISTRATOR . Permission was given and the next day we met after school at the library. Each understood this was support and guidance they would need to do the work. We reviewed everything from intros and conclusions, thesis to topic sentences, MLA format . They revised and edited. They resubmitted their papers and we waited for the grades. the papers came back and they all passed not one with a grade lower than a "B". They all graduated and each one thanked me.

But from short staffing to low pay to bad benefits, paraeducators are facing multiple challenges that make it increasingly difficult to support students in all of the ways they need. Think about the cost of a dozen eggs at \$8 and milk \$6 for ½ a gallon. . MANY PARAS MAKE BARLEY ABOVE MINIMUM WAGE. WORKING IN A SCHOOL SYSTEM THEN BECOMES INCREASING

DIFFICULT TO MAKE ENDS MEET, 'TO PAY FOR INSURANCE OR MEDICINE WITH HIGH COST DEDUCTIBLES. On behalf of the thousands of people I am proud to represent, I urge you to make a significant investment in paraeducators, the work we do, and the students we serve. The work my fellow paras and I do every day in schools throughout our state is critical to a successful educational experience. And, while we are passionate about what we do, we need more than a pat on the back. We are asking for your support and commitment to make a meaningful appropriation directed at improving the pay, healthcare, retirement benefits, and professional development opportunities of our state's paras. Now is the time to make sure that this is the Year of the Paraeducator!

Thank you for hearing my testimony.

Cynthia Ross-Zweig  
Paraeducator, New Fairfield Public Schools  
President, Paraeducator Council, CSEA SEIU Local 2001